

AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions and listings of claims in the application:

LISTING OF CLAIMS:

1. (previously presented): A method for decontaminating necks of thermoplastic preforms before said preforms are blow molded or stretch-blow molded for manufacturing containers, the method comprising:

providing a pair of rails forming a path, the pair of rails configured to engage said preforms such that said preform necks ride above the pair of rails while bodies of the preforms ride below the rails,

passing said preforms one after the other through an upstream chamber inside which preform necks move along the path;

spraying continuously a decontaminating liquid inside said chamber toward said path in such a manner that a fog atmosphere of said decontaminating liquid is maintained inside said chamber with said preform necks being bathed in said fog of decontaminating liquid and with said preform necks having inside and outside surfaces which become wetted by said decontaminating liquid, said fog of decontaminating liquid being caused to flow through said chamber, and

passing then said preform necks being wetted by said decontaminating liquid in front of ultraviolet lamps arranged downstream of said chamber so that said preform necks become entirely irradiated inside and outside for at least a minimum predetermined period of time,

wherein the pair of rails are disposed between a spray spraying the decontamination liquid and the bodies of the preforms.

2. (canceled).

3. (previously presented): The method as claimed in claim 1, wherein the decontaminating product is hydrogen peroxide H_2O_2 .

4. (currently amended): A decontaminating installation for the decontamination of necks of thermoplastic preforms intended for being blow molded or stretch-blow molded for manufacturing containers, the installation comprising:

a pair of rails forming ~~ana narrow~~ opening configured to engage said preforms such that said preform necks ride above the pair of rails while bodies of the preforms ride below the rails,

a preform feeder device which is adapted for moving said preforms one after the other with necks thereof moving along a path,

wherein spray means are arranged inside a chamber and directed substantially in the direction of said path for spraying a decontaminating liquid toward said path and in such a way that a fog atmosphere of said decontaminating liquid is maintained inside said chamber, with said preform necks having inside and outside surfaces which become wetted by said decontaminating liquid,

wherein suction means are connected to said chamber and are arranged so as to cause said fog of said decontamination liquid to flow through said chamber,

wherein an ultraviolet lamp unit is arranged downstream of said chamber so that ultraviolet radiation entirely irradiates said wetted preform necks inside and outside, and

wherein said ultraviolet lamp unit has a length and said preform feeder device is adapted for moving said preforms one after the other with a speed that said moving wetted preform necks become entirely irradiated inside and outside for a least a minimum predetermined period of time,

wherein the pair of rails is disposed between the spray means and the bodies of the preforms ~~and wherein the pair of rails shields the preform bodies from the decontaminating liquid sprayed from the spray means,~~

wherein said preform feeder device inside the chamber includes a rod which has a relatively small transverse dimension relative to the neck diameter and which extends along and above said path so as to be above said preform necks, whereby said rod prevents said preforms being lifted up but allows said fog of decontaminating product to access the inside walls of the preform necks.

5. (previously presented): The installation as claimed in claim 4, wherein the spray means comprise at least two spray nozzles arranged inside said chamber on either side of said path and above said path, said two spray nozzles being respectively directed substantially in the direction of said path.

6. - 7. (canceled).

8. (previously presented): The installation as claimed in claim 4, wherein said preform feeder device comprises an inclined slide guide extending through said chamber and down which said preforms slide by gravity one after the other.

9. - 16. (canceled).